**Mammals**

The group of animals we call mammals is the best known class in the animal kingdom, mainly because it includes ourselves, as well as all the animals that are the most familiar to us. Mammals are however, further divided into three orders: placentals, whose young are born in an advanced state, marsupials, whose young are born in an embryonic stage, their development being completed in the mother’s pouch and monotremes, or egg-laying mammals.

Mammals are defined as vertebrates animals with body hair, mammary glands and four limbs, which are modifies into fins in most aquatic mammals. They breathe air and are warm blooded – that is their internal body temperature remains more or less constant, regardless of the surrounding, external temperature. They have an efficient circulatory system with a heart that has four separate chambers.

Mammals reproduce by true mating between males and females and with the exception of monotremes, the young develop inside the females’ uterus. Young are feed initially on their mother milk, suckled from the mammary glands.

There have been mammals living in the world for 200 million years, although the greatest number of different species existed about 15 million years ago. Today there are about 4000 separate species of which nearly half are rodents. The largest animals alive, such as the great whales and the elephant are mammals, and the blue whale is in fact the largest animals ever to have lived on Earth.

PROTOTHERIA (platapus) METHATHERIA (kangaroo) EUTHERIA (aardvarks)

Monotremes Marsupials Placentals